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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000797

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TAGS: PREL PTER PAID PGOV CE NO LTTE

SUBJECT: NORWEGIANS SEE NO PROGRESS ON JOINT RELIEF MECHANISM

REF: (A) COLOMBO 0789 (B) COLOMBO 0741

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires James F. Entwistle for reason 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. The Norwegians report no progress on the joint relief mechanism since Solheim's visit earlier in April. Norwegian FM Peterson will try to cajole CBK (just returned from vacation) towards progress in an imminent phone conversation; DFM Helgesen may appear on BBC to rebut the view that the mechanism is a Norwegian initiative being imposed on the local parties. Norwegian ambassador opines that his government should seriously reassess its facilitation role if the mechanism effort fails, as should the co-chairs. End Summary

¶2. (C) Charge' called on Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar April 28 for a status report on the joint mechanism between the government of Sri Lanka (GSL), the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Muslim community on tsunami relief in the north and east. A glum Brattskar said there has been no progress since Norwegian envoy Solheim's visit (Ref B), especially since President Kumaratunga (CBK) had been abroad on vacation (she returned to Colombo April 26). He told the Charge' that Norwegian Foreign Minister Peterson would be calling CBK in the next twenty-four hours (a planned call earlier on April 28 had not worked out due to a misunderstanding over time differences). In that call, Brattskar said, Peterson will tell CBK that it is time to fish or cut bait on the joint mechanism. If she is serious, the Foreign Minister will say, it must be signed by next week at the latest. Brattskar said he has been making the same points at the working level already.

¶3. (C) Brattskar said he is not at all sanguine that CBK has the political courage to go forward on the mechanism. She is under increasing attack on numerous fronts from coalition "partner" JVP; the rhetoric will only get harsher over the upcoming "May Day weekend." Moreover, her Muslim allies in her coalition are harshly critical of the joint mechanism. For their part, the LTTE has told Brattskar it wants to sign but will not publicly "say yes" if there is a chance the GSL will publicly "say no." Brattskar underlined that all of the substantive and textual differences have been resolved. What remains is the political question of whether to sign. Even if both sides agree to go forward, Brattskar noted, the mechanics of a "signing" will be problematic. The document would likely be signed by the LTTE Peace Secretariat. On the government side, however, Brattskar has been told that GSL Peace Secretariat chief Jayantha Dhanapala would not sign.

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Rather, it should be one of the "line ministers" who would have some responsibility for implementing the mechanism. Brattskar said he doubts there would be an actual joint ceremony. Rather, he would take the document up to Kilinochchi for a signature and then bring it back down for the same in Colombo.

¶4. (C) Brattskar agreed with the Charge's assessment that the public campaign against the mechanism and against the Norwegian facilitators had become extremely ugly in recent days (although knocked off the April 28 front pages by coverage of a serious rail accident); the local press was becoming subsumed in the issue of who first came up with the idea of a mechanism. (Examples: A number of editorials have cast the mechanism as something being imposed by the Norwegians, rather than the product of Sri Lankan negotiations facilitated by Norwegians, to which Sri Lanka must accede if it wants to receive donor assistance. The Patriotic National Movement (a JVP front) plastered city streets with a particularly gruesome image - the photo of a slain public servant, killed by the LTTE while having his lunch, accompanied by the comment "Do we give murderous tiger terrorists who murdered Mr. Kallanathan (who was then a Director in the Ministry of Vocational Training for the North and East) while having his meal, a joint mechanism?" The right-wing Buddhist Monk party, Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), asked how the GSL could enter into the deal "with a criminal and terrorist." During an April 27 meeting with Polchief, JHU representatives claimed that, despite never having seen the draft of the joint mechanism agreement, it would confer status and legitimacy on the LTTE and provide a means for direct payments to the LTTE, which they would

use to purchase weapons.)

15. (C) Brattskar said that Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Helgesen probably would be interviewed on BBC April 28 from Oslo and would make the point that the GSL and the LTTE both had, immediately after the tsunami, recognized the need for some sort of joint arrangement and that Norway had been facilitating a Sri Lankan initiative, not imposing its own ideas. Brattskar said Helgesen also might make the point (as Brattskar has been doing) that much of the criticism of the mechanism is misguided since it implies that, if the GSL agrees to the mechanism, it will be initiating a process of consultation with and outreach to the Tigers. "The government crossed that bridge with the cease-fire agreement," Brattskar noted. If the joint mechanism founders, Brattskar commented, it would be time for the Norwegians to seriously reconsider whether they should continue the facilitation effort since, absent a mechanism, there is no chance of progress back towards the peace table. Brattskar said the early June timeframe for a co-chairs meeting in Washington would be perfect since "we may have to have some serious discussions."

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